

payments on time and in full. Are some people having a hard time making these mortgage payments? Of course they are. Can the government help? Yes, in some cases. But I urge my colleagues to be very careful here. We do not need for the Federal Government to be the piggy bank for folks that made poor decisions or to bail out the lenders that made loans to people that really didn't have the capacity to pay it back. It is not fair to penalize those folks that made good decisions and played by the rules by taking their tax money and rewarding those who didn't.

For many of my constituents, they are having a hard time just making their own mortgage payment. What we shouldn't be doing is taking their tax money to pay their neighbor's payment.

Madam Speaker, I encourage folks to be very cautious about these bail-out programs.

STUDY REVEALS MIDDLE CLASS WORSE OFF THAN THEY WERE FIVE YEARS AGO

(Mr. PERLMUTTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Madam Speaker, 7 years of President Bush's economic policies have put a tremendous strain on middle-class families. Since 2001, health care premiums have gone up almost \$6,000, college tuition has increased by \$2,500, and gas prices have more than doubled. With these increases and paychecks that have, on the average, fallen, it's no wonder that the majority of Americans say their economic situation has not improved in the last 5 years.

While the Bush administration is eager to give tax breaks to the wealthiest of Americans and assist Wall Street firms like Bear Stearns, it does little to help middle-class families. Madam Speaker, the Democratic House recognizes the immediate need to help middle-class families, and that is why our budget prioritized middle-class tax relief and why we are proposing a second economic stimulus package.

It's time for President Bush to put the middle class ahead of the wealthiest few.

WHEN WILL THE DEMOCRAT LEADERSHIP KEEP ITS COMMITMENT TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

(Mr. WALDEN of Oregon asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WALDEN of Oregon. Madam Speaker, by refusing to renew the county payments program, Congress has broken its pledge to rural areas all across this country like Grant County, Oregon, where Federal land covers 61 percent of the county. That's 300 square miles larger than the entire State of Delaware.

The school children of Grant County rely on the Federal Government to be a

good neighbor. During my most recent visit to Prairie City School and the eighth grade class of Andy Demko, I was told by the school superintendent, Newell Cleaver, that only the county payments funds through the Road Department have kept the schools going.

Our Speaker has said she would like this to be "The Children's Congress." So why won't the Democratic leadership bring a vote on H.R. 3058, which is a bipartisan, 4-year reauthorization timber program, keeping a 100-year-old commitment from this government to these counties?

It has been 112 days since H.R. 3058 was made eligible for a vote. It's here on the Union Calendar of the House. We have had 51 legislative days when it could have been brought up for a vote to help secure rural schools, and yet the leadership of this House refuses to even schedule it for a vote on the House floor.

When will the Democrat leadership of the House keep its commitment to rural communities?

URGING THE PRESIDENT TO STOP FILLING THE STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE

(Mr. WILSON of Ohio asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WILSON of Ohio. Madam Speaker, as gas prices have once again hit record highs, congressional Democrats are urging President Bush to take action. For 7 years he has sat on the sidelines, and even last week at a press conference in the Rose Garden, he concluded that the cost-benefit analysis of immediate action for consumers were not persuasive enough for him to act.

House Democrats are calling on President Bush to stop filling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. This reserve is 97 percent full, which is more than enough to meet any emergency we would have. Experts believe that tapping the reserve could lower our gas prices by as much as 5 cents to 25 cents per gallon.

Right now, Americans need help. They're hurting. President Bush could take action today that would provide immediate relief to consumers at the pump, but he refuses to act. Once again, House Democrats urge the President to reconsider.

HOOSIERS VOTE WITH MORE CONFIDENCE TODAY

(Mr. PENCE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PENCE. Madam Speaker, today America's eyes are turning to Indiana and North Carolina as tens of thousands of Americans are making their decision in primary election days. And thanks to the United States Supreme Court decision in Crawford v. Marion County Election Board, et al., Hoosiers will be voting today with greater confidence than ever before.

The Supreme Court decided last week in a 6-3 decision that Indiana's laws requiring photo identification to vote is constitutional. In its opinion, the Supreme Court noted, "There is no question about the legitimacy or importance of a State's interest in counting only eligible voters' votes." It further stated, "Indiana's interest in protecting public confidence in elections, while closely related to its interest in preventing voter fraud, has independent significance, because such confidence encourages citizen participation in the democratic process."

Indiana's laws had its critics in this body, but I rise to extol the Supreme Court and all of those in Indiana and North Carolina who, with greater confidence today, will exercise their franchise and guide America's future integrity.

TIME FOR ACTION ON RECORD GAS PRICES

(Mr. WELCH of Vermont asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Madam Speaker, for the past 7 years, President Bush has been delivering an energy policy that has resulted in the highest increase in the cost of energy in the history of this country. Last week, the President continued his call for more of the same when he touted an old plan for domestic drilling in the Arctic that would produce a 6-month supply of oil 10 years from now. It is not going to do anything about the price at the pump now, it is not going to do anything about the price at the pump later.

Instead, the President is blaming congressional Democrats for not addressing the problem, but it's the President who won't suspend purchases of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve which would bring down prices 25 cents immediately. It's the President who won't work with us to get rid of the Enron loophole which is enriching speculators and clobbering middle class families.

This year, in fact, the Democratic Congress has passed energy legislation that's getting nowhere because of being held hostage in the Senate and it has no support from the President of the United States.

The reality is that we have actions we can take in the short term, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the Enron loophole, and in the long term, to reduce our reliance on carbon.

INVEST IN AMERICAN ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, Americans are paying the price at the pump for the inaction of this majority. Democrats promised